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Congress of the United States
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June 20, 2008

<http://markudall.house.gov/HoR/Co02/home>

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing with regard to the classified draft GAO report assessing costs and vulnerabilities of the relocation of the nation's air and space defense command from Cheyenne Mountain to the new NORAD/NorthCom command center at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

As you know, information from a classified draft GAO report was recently leaked to a Colorado Springs newspaper, which reported on GAO's findings on June 16. I have since been briefed on the draft GAO report, and I am appalled at what I've learned.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have long been concerned about the potential vulnerability of the new command center to attack. Since I first learned about the proposed move in a conversation with Admiral Keating in June 2006 – during which he claimed significant cost savings and efficiencies and made no mention of potential security vulnerabilities – NORAD/NorthCom has provided limited and inadequate information to Congress explaining the rationale for and benefits of the move from Cheyenne Mountain. As the Colorado Congressional delegation wrote in a letter to Admiral Keating in July 2006, "We believe that the decision to relocate personnel from the Cheyenne Mountain Complex to Peterson AFB must be done with the support of, and in coordination with, Congress, and more specifically, the Colorado congressional delegation." This has not happened.

Despite repeatedly expressed concerns, I have never heard an explanation of how Peterson AFB would be as secure a place for these critical systems. Furthermore, General Renuart has repudiated the apparent savings that Admiral Keating touted as the initial impetus for this move. That's why I worked last year with the House Armed Services Committee to pass language in the Defense Authorization bill that would prohibit further funding for the move conditional on the receipt of a report analyzing security-related costs and anticipated operational benefits from the move, as well as final plans for the relocation of the command center. The Senate would not agree to the language, as you know, which allowed NORAD/NorthCom to continue with the move.

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
June 20, 2008
Page Two

I was pleased that additional legislation was once again included in the House version of the Defense Authorization bill to prohibit further movement from Cheyenne Mountain to Peterson Air Force Base, and I look forward to working with the conferees to further strengthen this provision in conference. However, I believe that the degradation of our command and control capabilities should warrant immediate action.

I hope you agree that the revelations in the draft GAO report are serious enough to demand your urgent attention. The security vulnerabilities addressed in the report simply must be addressed – and addressed immediately, which may entail transferring air and space surveillance missions back to the Mountain from Peterson AFB. To delay action or ignore the GAO findings is to put our national security further at risk, as well as to potentially endanger the Colorado Springs community.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mark Udall", written in a cursive style.

Mark Udall